

**133**

**Reihe Politikwissenschaft**

**Political Science Series**

# **Déjà-vu (again): The Lisbon Treaty Referendum in Ireland**

**Michael Marsh and Laura Schwirz**



**INSTITUT FÜR HÖHERE STUDIEN**  
**INSTITUTE FOR ADVANCED STUDIES**

**Vienna**



# **Déjà-vu (again): The Lisbon Treaty Referendum in Ireland**

Michael Marsh and Laura Schwirz

February 2013

**Contact:**

Michael Marsh  
Professor of Comparative Political Behaviour and  
Dean of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences  
Trinity College Dublin  
Dublin 2,  
Ireland  
E-Mail: mmarsh@tcd.ie

---

Founded in 1963 by two prominent Austrians living in exile – the sociologist Paul F. Lazarsfeld and the economist Oskar Morgenstern – with the financial support from the Ford Foundation, the Austrian Federal Ministry of Education, and the City of Vienna, the Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS) is the first institution for postgraduate education and research in economics and the social sciences in Austria. The **Political Science Series** presents research done at the Department of Political Science and aims to share “work in progress” before formal publication. It includes papers by the Department’s teaching and research staff, visiting professors, graduate students, visiting fellows, and invited participants in seminars, workshops, and conferences. As usual, authors bear full responsibility for the content of their contributions.

Das Institut für Höhere Studien (IHS) wurde im Jahr 1963 von zwei prominenten Exilösterreichern – dem Soziologen Paul F. Lazarsfeld und dem Ökonomen Oskar Morgenstern – mit Hilfe der Ford-Stiftung, des Österreichischen Bundesministeriums für Unterricht und der Stadt Wien gegründet und ist somit die erste nachuniversitäre Lehr- und Forschungsstätte für die Sozial- und Wirtschaftswissenschaften in Österreich. Die **Reihe Politikwissenschaft** bietet Einblick in die Forschungsarbeit der Abteilung für Politikwissenschaft und verfolgt das Ziel, abteilungsinterne Diskussionsbeiträge einer breiteren fachinternen Öffentlichkeit zugänglich zu machen. Die inhaltliche Verantwortung für die veröffentlichten Beiträge liegt bei den Autoren und Autorinnen. Gastbeiträge werden als solche gekennzeichnet.

## **Abstract**

There has been an increasing use of direct democracy in the form of referendums on aspects of European integration. Two such referendums have been held in Ireland in 2008 and 2009 with the outcome changing from a No to a Yes vote. This paper addresses the question of what explains the change in outcome in two referendums on essentially the same document. It will do so by looking at the role of the campaign in providing information and hence reducing uncertainty, the importance of issue frames and the impact of domestic considerations on vote choice. It is suggested that there has not been a change in underlying attitudes but a change in how the Irish electorate weighed the same factors differently at both referendums. In addition, a change in economic conditions at the time of the second referendum also had an effect on how voters decided the second time around.

## **Keywords**

Lisbon Treaty, Ireland, referendum, vote choice, voting behavior, issue voting, second-order voting.

**General note on content**

The opinions expressed in this paper are those of the author and not necessarily those of the IHS.

## **Contents**

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>LITERATURE REVIEW ON VOTING BEHAVIOUR IN REFERENDUMS.....</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>SITE FOR STUDY: POLITICAL BACKGROUND AND ELECTORAL CONTEXT OF LISBON I AND II.....</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS.....</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>V.</b>	<b>THE DATA.....</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>VI.</b>	<b>ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>VII.</b>	<b>DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>VIII.</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS .....</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>IX.</b>	<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>X.</b>	<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>29</b>





## I. Introduction

When considering the dynamics of European integration in recent years, it becomes evident that there has been an increase in the use of direct democracy in the form of referendums to decide on crucial aspects of European integration, such as treaty changes or their actual ratification (Lisbon Treaty), accessions to the European Union (2004 Eastern Enlargement) or the adoption of the common currency (Denmark in 2000). In the course of the past four decades, a total of 45 referendums decided on aspects of European integration. The most recent referendum on European integration has been held in Ireland in 2009 after having failed to secure a Yes vote the first time in 2008. Considering that both France and the Netherlands had an unpleasant experience with the ratification of its predecessor, The Constitutional Treaty, which had been rejected in referendums in 2005, they now chose to let parliament make the decision on whether to adopt the Lisbon Treaty or not, leaving Ireland the only country to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon by popular vote. Having failed to secure a Yes vote at the first referendum in 2008, a second vote was held the year after and a Yes vote was reached. Taking this change in outcome as a starting point, one might wonder what has led to this scenario. Essentially, we are presented with two referendums on more or less the same document but with two very different outcomes. The central question to be addressed in this paper thus is what explains the change from a No to a Yes vote at Lisbon II? Several options will be explored. For instance, what role did the pro- and anti-treaty campaigns play in providing information and reducing uncertainty among the electorate? Were voters more informed the second time around and hence their voting behaviour had become less volatile? To what extent have attitudes changed on issues such as European integration, government performance and Irish neutrality? And finally, was it decisive that the second referendum was fought under a different economic climate?

The article will be structured as follows. Section 2 will discuss the literature on voting behaviour in referendums and its applicability to the two Lisbon Treaty referendums. Section 3 will briefly describe the economic and political circumstances at the time of both referendums and explore the two election campaigns in terms of their organisation and participation of various groups. Section 4 will discuss theoretical expectations before proceeding to Section 5, which presents data used for the subsequent analysis. The paper concludes with a discussion of the results.

## II. Literature review on voting behaviour in referendums

Interest in referendums is growing and has produced its own literature as part of the wider study of voting behaviour. Although much of the research on voting behaviour in general elections can easily be applied to the study of vote choice in referendums, a distinct field of research has developed that specifically addresses the peculiarities of referendums that distinguish them from other elections.

A theory well advanced in the literature on vote choice in referendums is that of issue- and second-order voting. The former approach focuses on individuals' values and beliefs with regard to the speed and direction of European integration. Put differently, voters base their decision on whether to endorse or reject EU treaties on their underlying attitudes towards European integration (Siune et al., 1994; Svensson, 2002). For this to happen, domestic considerations need to be de-coupled from the subject of the referendum itself. This approach allows voters to make reasoned calculations in line with their attitudes on European integration when deciding how to choose in a referendum. The second-order theory on the other hand is associated with the idea that referendums are sometimes considered as second-order elections where domestic considerations are a powerful determinant of vote choice (Reif and Schmitt, 1980; Franklin et al., 1994; Franklin, 2002). National issues tend to dominate the campaign and voters use their vote as means of signalling support or dissatisfaction with the performance of the incumbent government. The referendum itself is perceived as less salient and consequently voters are more likely to decide on the basis of domestic considerations rather than on the subject matter of the referendum. While the second-order approach enables voters to express their domestic preferences, the issue-voting theory maintains that voters make rational calculations on the basis of their attitudes on EU-related matters. Much debate has revolved about which of these approaches provides a more accurate account of voting behaviour in referendums. Although they might not necessarily be mutually exclusive, it is more interesting to explore why and under what conditions people rely more on their attitudes towards the EU rather than on second-order, that is domestic, considerations. Moreover, the issue-voting approach leaves open the question of what exactly are the issues and how the pro- and anti-referendum groups have framed them in the course of the campaign. Therefore, we need to identify and explore further the issues on which voters based their vote choice in the Lisbon Treaty referendums and think about the conditions that maximise second-order and issue considerations rather than simply look at which one of the two theories applies. In other words, it would be more interesting to discuss the issues that arose in the course of the campaign and how they have been framed by the Yes and No sides. Moreover, it is worth exploring to what extent domestic considerations such as government performance factored into the decision-making process of the Irish electorate. If the issue-approach were more applicable, then we would expect Irish voters to rely on their underlying attitudes towards Europe when deciding how to vote. This is rather unlikely considering that second-order

considerations such as satisfaction with the government under the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern may have hindered a vote on Treaty-related issues.

A second strand of literature considers the role and impact of referendum campaigns in providing information required to reduce uncertainty and confusion among the electorate. For instance, de Vreese (2007) found that the electorate in referendums tends to be more volatile given the complexity of the subject and high demands on the voter, making referendum campaigns even more vital in shaping voter preferences. Moreover, de Vreese and Semetko (2004) analyse the dynamics of referendum campaigns and highlight the importance of their agenda-setting and framing effects as well as the role of issue frames. Although referendum campaigns are similar to those at general elections in their role of providing information, they are even more crucial in that voting is often on complex and rather technical issues such as constitutional amendments. Although this is to some extent ameliorated by the fact that voters are faced with a simple either/or choice, voters are still dependent on factual knowledge and information to make a reasoned decision on Election Day<sup>1</sup>. Scholars within this field have looked at the role of heuristics such as elite behaviour and simple campaign cues that help voters make reasoned choices in referendums (Lupia, 1992, 1994; Bowler and Donovan, 1998; Lupia and Johnston, 2001). One of the most easily accessible shortcuts in referendums is that of elite endorsements when not only parties take sides in campaigns but business and civil society groups may also be regarded as vital cue givers. They all become active in the campaign with the primary goal of setting the agenda as early as possible and providing vital information on said agenda (Holbrook, 1996; Farrell and Schmitt-Beck, 2002; Hug and Tsebelis, 2002). Additional shortcuts include party ID, economic perceptions and government performance (Hobolt, 2005, 2006). If voters are satisfied with the way the government operates at the time of the election, they might be more inclined to follow the government's recommendation on how to vote. If, however, they are dissatisfied with the way government works, they might use their vote to signal disapproval. Essentially, voters are highly dependent on these shortcuts to be able to make up their mind in the election.

Information is vital to overcome the high levels of uncertainty and confusion that often characterises the electorate in a referendum. It is important to note here that not only the amount and selection but also the presentation of information critically shapes people's perceptions of the treaty document, and more importantly about its implications upon being ratified. Hobolt (2009) rightly argues that if focus is placed on the negative consequences of a No vote, people tend to favour a proposal whereas if negative consequences of a Yes vote are highlighted, people are more likely to oppose the ballot. The former approach is usually pursued by the Yes side of a referendum campaign which became evident in particular at

---

<sup>1</sup> In general, voters are presented with a simple binary choice as can be seen in the wording of the Lisbon Treaty referendum bill in 2009: "Do you approve of the proposal to amend the Constitution contained in the undermentioned Bill? Twenty-Eighth Amendment of the Constitution (Treaty of Lisbon) Bill 2009" Voters were asked to place a mark in either the Yes or the No box.

Lisbon II, when a unified Yes side strongly emphasised adverse economic consequences of a second No vote. No campaigners are more likely to adopt the second strategy of drawing attention to negative consequences of a Yes vote which can be seen at Lisbon I when an alleged loss of the Irish Commissioner, a threat to Ireland's low corporate tax rates and a reduction in minimum wages became the centre of attention.

However, we are still left with the question of what determines which issues become important so that actors involved in the campaign know on what to focus and to provide information. A more recent strand discusses the role of issue frames in referendum campaigns (de Vreese and Semetko, 2004; Hobolt 2009). This literature is concerned with how certain aspects of a proposal are emphasised in a campaign while others are downplayed or even ignored (that is, they are kept off the agenda). The central idea is that the same proposal can be framed in *different* ways (Hobolt, 2009). Important for the analysis of Lisbon I and II is the consequence frame which posits that positive and negative consequences of the two possible outcomes are highlighted by both campaign sides. In other words, people's perception of the Treaty was influenced by the way in which the proposal and the reversion point, that is the policy entailed by a No vote, had been framed by the two opposing sides. Public opinion is not only swayed by information provided by such frames but also provides firm opinions on the proposal that are in line with pre-existing attitudes on European integration. In this vein, the status quo bias theory maintains that voters attach more weight to the possible costs rather than the possible benefits of a change (Clarke et al., 2000; Beach and Nielsen, 2007). Applying this to the two Lisbon referendums, it might be argued that voters were more susceptible to the No side at Lisbon I considering that they strongly emphasised the costs involved if the Treaty was endorsed while being weakly disposed to the benefits highlighted by the Yes side. Put differently, costs involved in ratifying the Treaty (for example, transfer further economic decision-making powers to the EU) were deemed higher than the benefits derived from passing the Treaty (for example, facilitate decision-making in the EU and changing voting procedures in the Council of Ministers). The campaign at Lisbon I for the most part revolved around various bad consequences of a Yes vote and the No campaign took advantage of the fact that the electorate was uninformed about the Treaty and its implications (Qvortrup, 2009). The Yes side made the mistake of letting the No side frame the issues and set the agenda while the No campaign took advantage of the fact that voters were confused about a document that not even the then Taoiseach Brian Cowen had read "from cover-to-cover" (Horan, 2008).

The Irish electorate was asked to vote on essentially the same Treaty on two occasions, but the first time, it was rejected by 53% while the second time, it was accepted by 67%<sup>2</sup>. But

---

<sup>2</sup> Of course Ireland also held two referendums on the Nice treaty and which the outcome changed on the second vote. However, there are significant differences. Turnout at Nice 1 increased by almost 15% with the Yes side almost doubling and the No side remaining roughly the same, which suggests that abstainers mainly joined the Yes side rather than No voters changing their mind. Turnout at Lisbon 2, however, only increased by 5%, and the Yes vote increased from 46% to 67% and No voters dropped from 53% to 32%, which would imply a 'conversion' of No voters rather than abstainers joining the Yes camp. With turnout remaining almost the same but a fundamental change in

what exactly accounts for these different outcomes? Two scenarios are possible. First, public opinion changed on the factors that in 2008 were favourable to a different outcome. Second, the distribution of public opinion did not change, but voters weighed issues differently at both referendums. In order to decide which one applies, we need to explore to what extent the two campaigns differed at Lisbon I and II. In addition, we need to analyse the role of information, which will help us answer the question of whether people were more informed at Lisbon II and if so, did it have an impact on the final outcome? Bearing in mind the role of domestic considerations, did government performance play into account, given the financial allegations concerning the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern? And finally, was the vote essentially determined by the same factors, that is by the same issue frames, or did voters weighed them differently at Lisbon I and II? The main argument to be analysed in the data section below will be that voters did not change their underlying attitudes towards European integration but weighed the same factors differently at each referendum. In fact, it was changes in the context, campaign style and economic circumstances that contributed much more to the change in outcome.

---

the distribution of Yes and No voters, it is all the more interesting to explore what accounts for the different outcome at the second Lisbon referendum.

### III. Site for study: political background and electoral context of Lisbon I and II

Irish level of support for the EU, as measured by *Eurobarometer* surveys, has remained high over the past twenty years, which made a negative result of the first referendum quite unexpected. Politicians erroneously assumed the referendum would be carried comfortably, given that 82% of Irish people believed that Ireland had benefited from EU membership, compared to an EU average 54%, and 73% of respondents agreed that 'membership is a good thing' (*Eurobarometer* 69.2, 2008). An imminent change in Government delayed an official announcement of the election date, as the then Taoiseach Bertie Ahern (Fianna Fáil) was deeply involved in financial allegations, which eventually resulted in his resignation in April 2008. He was succeeded by the former Finance Minister Brian Cowen, who officially announced the referendum on April 25. The date was set to be Thursday, June 12. By then, the anti-referendum side was already in full swing and well prepared to fight an organised campaign against the ratification of the Treaty.

Given the decline of political parties as institutions, a rapid growth in electronic media technologies and the significance of opinion polls, campaigns are now regarded as mobilisers, main sources of information and key providers of valuable cues and short cuts. They are responsible for (re)presenting the framing of election issues in response to how campaigners on each side of the debate present their arguments (de Vreese and Semetko, 2004). Farrell and Schmitt-Beck (2002) argue that campaign effects are contingent on its nature and the individual voter, finding that campaigns do matter but not necessarily for all voters all the time regardless of circumstances. Moreover, Zaller (1992) suggests that voters often enter campaigns with weak predispositions and low information levels, which is particularly the case in elections where new or previously unfamiliar issues enter the political arena. Therefore, a timely start to a campaign, setting the agenda and framing the issues are key ingredients to a successful campaign. At Lisbon I, these features primarily applied to the No campaign. The prominent No group *Libertas* effectively launched its campaign in December 2007 immediately after the Treaty had been signed. Not only did its campaigning start much earlier, but it was also more coherent, organised and well structured. In addition, the No side benefited from the generous financial support and widespread news coverage of *Libertas* leader Declan Ganley who was said to have spent more than one million Euros on its campaign and thus far outspent the Yes side (Collins and Hennessy, 2008). The agenda as defined by the No side was about the EU's democratic deficit, threats to Ireland's low corporate tax rate and workers' rights, as well as the general diminution of Ireland's influence within a European Union after the ratification of the Treaty, making it almost impossible for the Yes side to catch up in time or to reframe the issues in line with their arguments to support the Treaty. The Yes side was also divided, notably between government and opposition. Most parties campaigned in favour of the Treaty, but the Green Party failed to reach a two-third majority necessary to endorse the Treaty. In addition, campaign posters

tended to feature faces instead of facts while the No side employed provocative and clear messages to attract undecided and poorly informed voters. As a consequence, the Yes side faced a double challenge: first, they had to address these issues and clarify misconceptions accordingly, and second they were required to educate voters by presenting their arguments to vote in favour of Lisbon<sup>3</sup>.

Given this somewhat one sided and relatively low-intensity campaign, it is not surprising that voters felt they lacked a substantial understanding of the Treaty on polling day. Low information levels combined with uncertainty reduced the chances of issue voting with low issue salience and voting on domestic considerations as a result. Sinnott et al. (2009) found a strong relation between information levels and vote choice, with those feeling they had insufficient information being more likely to abstain or vote No in 2008. A lack of information increased voter uncertainty, not only in terms of treaty knowledge, but also with regard to other domestic issues that were erroneously perceived to be included in the Treaty.

The Referendum Commission found that in April 2008 only 20% stated they understood what the Lisbon Treaty was about “to some extent”, “quite well” or “very well” compared to 44% in June (Referendum Commission Report, 2008) Polls conducted for the Irish Times by TNS-MRBI showed similar results, with only marginal increases between May and June in terms of “good understanding” (6% and 8% respectively). One third of voters were “vaguely aware” of the issues involved (31% in May and 33% in June) and 23% “understood some of the issues” in May as compared to 32% in June. *Figure 1* indicates how information levels gradually changed over the course of the campaign.

Responding to the failure to secure a Yes vote at the first referendum, the government identified key problems that had made a vote in favour of the treaty impossible. Among them were misconceptions about the issues raised by the referendum, implications for Ireland’s role in the EU and complaints about lack of information and poor knowledge of the treaty document. Not only did the guarantees secured at an EU summit in June 2009 offer a legal justification for holding a second referendum, but more importantly provided the Yes side with good reason to endorse the Treaty, emphasising that it had listened to the concerns of the electorate to which the guarantees were tailored<sup>4</sup>. This was also intended to take a range of reasons for voting No and abstention off the agenda and critically weaken the arguments

---

<sup>3</sup> Slogans that featured on **Yes campaign posters**: ‘Good for Ireland, Good for Europe. Vote Yes.’ (Fianna Fáil), ‘Vote Yes for jobs, the economy and Ireland’s future’ (IBEC).

Slogans that featured on **No campaign posters**: ‘Yes to Europe, NO to Superstate’ (Peace and Neutrality Alliance), ‘A Europe for people, not profit and war’ (People before Profit Alliance), ‘€ 1.84: Minimum wage after Lisbon?’ and ‘Milked Dry’ (Cair).

<sup>4</sup> Technically, the document itself did not undergo any changes but it was agreed that Irish competency over tax rates, abortion and neutrality would be retained and each member state would continue to nominate a Commissioner. This resulted in the second referendum being held in a different legal and political context

used by the No side at Lisbon I. All major political parties<sup>5</sup> presented a unified picture to the electorate, calling jointly for a Yes vote in early September to avoid previous campaign mistakes, focusing on the guarantees and how to respond to a rapid decline in the Irish economy. This time, the Yes side outspent the No campaign, considering the withdrawal of *Libertas* leader Declan Ganley that left the treaty's opponents in a weaker financial position compared to Lisbon I. The second campaign mainly revolved around the Treaty being the solution to a rapid recovery from a poor economic climate in which the country found itself at the time of the second referendum. In addition, the Yes side was better organised and enjoyed strong support from civil society groups. Arguably, as a result, the electorate was more informed about the issues at stake and thus more likely to base its decision on them. Considering that the same issues were emphasised differently, that is by different campaign sides to varying degrees, did voters really change their underlying attitudes towards these issues or did the issues weigh differently in their decision-making process?

---

<sup>5</sup> The Green Party reached the required two-third majority and for the first time officially endorsed a European treaty. On July 18, 2009, members of the Green Party voted on the question whether to endorse the treaty or not. Of those present, 214 voted Yes while 107 voted No, thus securing the two-third majority.



#### IV. Theoretical expectations

Given a more active campaign at Lisbon II and a reasonably greater role played by the Yes side within that campaign, what attitudes should we expect voters to have about the issues raised in the course of the campaign? One might argue that issues were emphasised differently by both sides of the referendum campaigns and therefore weighed differently in the decision-making process of the electorate. Put differently, we do not expect to find a change in underlying attitudes towards European integration but more so a change in the distribution of variables that were favourable to a Yes vote.

A second set of considerations is related to the greater level of activity in the campaign. Considering that lack of information was the key reason to vote No at Lisbon I, a more vigorous campaign in 2009 is expected to produce a well-informed electorate, which would make voting less idiosyncratic and voting behaviour more predictable. If voters were in fact more informed the second time around, we would expect bad consequences as emphasised by the No side at Lisbon I to feature less prominently in voters' decision-making. Moreover, a change in economic conditions should also be taken into account, considering that Lisbon II was held at the onset of the economic and financial crisis in Ireland.

Essentially, it will be argued that there were no substantial changes in public opinion about issues such as the EU or neutrality but a change in the relationship between the views on these issues and vote choice. The different outcome at Lisbon II is expected to be attributable to the way in which these issues related to vote choice rather than to underlying variables. Therefore, we need to analyse to what extent the distribution of opinion shifted between 2008 and 2009 on issues such as government approval, EU support, neutrality and potential treaty consequences. Put differently, are the two votes determined by the same factors or did the factors stay the same but were weighed differently?

## V. The data

Data comes from two surveys conducted by RED C immediately after each referendum. RED C interviewed a random sample of 1,002 adults over the age of 18 and interviews were conducted across the country by telephone, using a mix of land and mobile lines. There were questions about general issues and about perceptions of the Treaty. For instance, respondents were asked about their knowledge of the EU in general, and the Treaty in particular, and about its implications, which featured prominently during the campaign. Respondents were provided with a number of claims that were made about what the Treaty would mean for Ireland. For instance, would the Treaty have “compromised Ireland’s neutrality” or “led to a change in tax on businesses”. In addition, questions were asked about past and future voting behaviour and evaluations of the current government.

The key variables for the analysis below are as follows:

- *Vote choice*: in the 2007 parliamentary elections; in a hypothetical general election ‘if it were to be held tomorrow’, and in the referendum.
- *Attitudes to major issues*: neutrality, immigration, abortion and taxation.
- *Attitudes to actors and institutions*: trust in party leaders and support for the EU as well as a question about political identity.<sup>6</sup>
- *Expectations about the consequences of a Yes vote*: on Ireland’s neutrality, the practice of abortion, tax on businesses, Ireland’s influence on EU decisions, protection of workers’ rights, unemployment, Ireland’s European Commissioner and decision-making in the EU.
- *Economic conditions and expectations*: past and future benefits of EU membership and retrospective personal economic evaluations.
- *Demographics*.

It appeared that responses to some questionnaire items derive from common, underlying orientations. This allowed us to construct two composite measures: a party leader trust scale and a negative treaty consequences scale. The first is comprised of four items on trust in ‘your’ party leader to do the right thing on the economy, health, Europe and moral issues; these items formed a very strong unidimensional cumulative scale. The second consists of five items tapping people’s expectation that the Treaty would have ‘bad’ consequences – at least the No campaign saw these as bad – in terms of neutrality, abortion, corporation taxes, unemployment, and Irish influence on EU decision-making.<sup>7</sup> The finding that a set of items is

<sup>6</sup> The support for integration variable originally contained missing values for 18% of cases because it was erroneously not asked of all respondents. We imputed missing values (using AMELIA, see King et al 2001) where data was missing.

<sup>7</sup> The unidimensionality of these two sets of items was assessed using Mokken’s procedure for stochastic cumulative scaling (Mokken, 1971; Niemöller and Van Schuur 1983; Van Schuur 2003). The strength of a Mokken scale is measured by the coefficient of homogeneity (H), which should exceed .30. The bad consequences Mokken scale has an H-coefficient of .47, and the trust scale of .68. For the purposes of these analyses each item was recoded into a dichotomy trust/ not trust and bad/not bad.

unidimensional is not only of importance in a measurement sense (allowing a composite measure to be used in lieu of a set of separate items), but also in terms of the substantive interpretation of what the constituent items reflect. The very diversity of the nature of the consequences, and the absence of any substantive linkage between them, suggests that the responses to these items are not rooted in specific ideas or expectations about how the Treaty would affect policy in each of these issue domains. Rather, they reflect the degree to which people hold a diffuse and generalized expectation that the Treaty will bring negative consequences. This will express itself in whatever policy domain is probed in terms of potential negative consequences. In other words, if asked whether consequences in other policy areas would be negative, people's responses would equally have reflected this generalized and diffuse feeling of apprehension.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> This interpretation begs the question why three of the items of this battery of items about consequences could not be included in this unidimensional bad consequences scale. The item that the treaty would 'lead us to losing our EU Commissioner for some of the time' probably does not fit because it is almost universally subscribed to, irrespective of one's opinion about the merits of the treaty. The other two items that were not part of the scale were that the treaty would 'have strengthened the protection of workers' rights' and 'have simplified decision-making in the EU'. The difference between these and the scaled items could be simply that these items are cast in positive evaluative terminology, whereas the scale items are formulated in negative terms.

## VI. Analysis

This analysis has three parts. First, we will look at the 2008 vote to establish the determinants of the No vote on that occasion, examining the effects of the variables outlined in the previous section. It will be shown that the No vote is associated with most of the possible determinants identified above, such as partisanship –support for different parties and attitude towards the government – and the interpretation of the Treaty, as well as more general political issues orientations, such as those on the EU in general and neutrality. Next we will look at how far the distribution of opinion shifted between 2008 and 2009 on these determinants. For instance, did voters become more or less supportive of the EU, or more or less supportive of the government parties? Clearly, if they did, that could explain the change in outcome between the two votes. If there is No change then we have to look elsewhere for an explanation. Finally, we will show the extent to which the two votes were determined by the same factors, and the extent to which the weight of each factor was very different.

*Table 1* shows the marginal effects of partisan cues, treaty interpretations and general issues on the No vote. Significant factors are in bold. (For the logit estimations underlying these, see Appendix.) The Table shows that all three of these sets of factors contributed to the outcome. Government voters tended to vote Yes though not in significant numbers, and those supporting the Yes inclined opposition parties were also not significantly more likely to vote Yes; the significant partisan, ‘second order’ effect was a clear association between disapproval of the government’s performance and a No vote. Some general issue orientations were significant drivers of an anti-Treaty choice, notably views on European integration and attitudes to Irish neutrality. Finally, features of the Treaty, and the debate about its possible consequences were linked significantly to vote choice. A general perception that the Treaty, if approved, would damage Irish neutrality, increase unemployment, bring abortion closer, diminish Irish influence in the EU and threaten Ireland’s low tax on international business led to a No vote, whereas a view that the Treaty would strengthen workers’ rights and simplify decision making gave rise to a Yes vote.

The perceived strength of what we have called the ‘bad’ consequences factor was addressed by the government in its dealings with the EU and lay behind the declaration by EU officials that the Treaty offered no threat to Irish neutrality, or to its (non) abortion regime and so on. However, after the No vote and before the possible second vote the government had to confront a banking crisis. Their response to this almost certainly led directly to its heavy electoral defeat in early 2011, as from that point the government’s own support level fell dramatically in terms of both popular satisfaction with the government and voting intentions for government parties.

*Table 2* shows the impact of some of these events on the distribution of opinion on the factors displayed in *Figure 2*. The most obvious changes were in terms of ‘bad’ consequences and disapproval of the government. The former moved the voters sharply in the direction of a Yes vote, whereas the latter moved opinion sharply towards a No vote. In general, however, there was little change in any of the factors that proved significant in the 2008 analysis (marked by bold letters again). In particular, there was no change in general orientations to the EU, or in trust of the political parties supported. On this basis it would appear that the expected outcome should not have been very different, although given the fact that the impact of the ‘bad’ consequences was greater than government dissatisfaction, we might expect a small boost to the Yes vote. In fact, if the estimates from the model run for 2008 are applied to the data for 2009, we can see that this is so. The predicted outcome from this exercise was a 4-percentage point shift away from the No side and towards the Yes side. This is very small, given that the actual shift was 22 points.

This implies that the statistical explanation for the different outcome in 2009 lies less in the underlying variables and more in the way in which those variables related to vote choice. In other words, there was a change in the marginal effects of some, or even most variables in the model. We can see this in *Table 3* (for the estimations underlying this table, see Appendix) that shows the marginal effects on a No vote of each variable in 2009 and 2008. Some of the partisanship variables had similar effects in 2009 to that which they had in 2008. This is true of government voting, and of Yes-opposition voting, although the Yes opposition parties mobilised their support better in 2009. The most striking change in this respect was the very weak, and insignificant, impact of government disapproval, which had a very significant impact in 2008. In 2009 this contributed at best marginally towards the No vote. This is notable since a large majority of people in 2009 disapproved of the government. Treaty interpretations were also less important; fewer thought there were bad consequences from a Yes vote, and such negative perceptions in any event had a smaller marginal effect, less than half of the 15 per cent found in 2008.

Other treaty features, such as simplifying decision-making and protecting workers’ rights also had much less impact, the perceived consequences being less related or even not related to vote choice. More general orientations on neutrality and European integration were also less important, and attitudes to neutrality were not significant at all. In general then attitudinal and treaty perception factors proved less important, and in many cases were not significant. Nor was government approval. The only factor that was more important was support for pro-treaty parties. Partisanship, at least in this sense, became more important as a wealth of issue related factors seemed to be less important.

## VII. Discussion

This result is a curious one. We would have expected the stronger campaign to have mobilised supporters of Fianna Fáil and the Greens, Fine Gael and Labour to support the Treaty, and a higher level of information to lessen the tendency of those who knew little other than that the Treaty was supported by a government of which they disapproved. We might have expected that a stronger Yes campaign would have changed the balance between Yes and No inclined attitudes, particularly with respect to perceptions of the consequences of a Yes vote, but we would not have expected such a campaign to leave such attitudes more weakly linked to vote choice. It is evident that people did know more about the treaty, but the implication seems to be that the Treaty simply did not matter as much!

*Figure 2* seems to confirm that information was much more closely related to voting No in 2008 than it was in 2009. Unfortunately, the 2008 survey did not contain any measure of information, but the 2009 survey did include a four-item knowledge scale. This is not geared to the Treaty as such but to the EU. However, it is reasonable to assume that those who know more about the EU will know more about the Treaty. We can compare the association between knowledge (measured in 2009) with vote choice in 2009 and recalled vote choice in 2008. What we see in *Figure 2* is that there is a strong link between recalled vote choice and knowledge, but a weaker relationship between knowledge and vote in 2009. Analysis of the government commissioned surveys, carried out by Millward Brown in July 2008 and November 2009 suggest a similar pattern with knowledge of the EU and the Treaty itself correlated more closely with vote choice in 2008 than 2009, and the knowledge of the Treaty itself much less significant in the outcome.

Why should that be so? A vital factor on the second occasion could well have been the sharp deterioration in the health of the Irish economy. Perhaps what we can now see as the unjustified confidence in the Irish state to make its own way in the world was replaced with a realisation that to get out of the mess in which the financial regime had left the country it would be necessary to seek help from Ireland's EU partners. It is hard to know how far this rationale was critical to the change in the outcome. The real significance of Ireland's economic woes took quite a long time to become evident, and perhaps only with the arrival of the team from the ECB and IMF was the situation exposed as critical for all to see, but the main fall in government support just, after the guarantees to the banks in Sept 2008. This was not long after the initial rejection of the Treaty. Polls were not taken regularly after this point, but an Irish Times/TNS MRBI poll in November 2008 suggested that the Yes side was now in the lead. The question asked here included the explicit assumption that EU leaders would provide the guarantees being asked for by the Irish government. This poll indicated a dramatic shift from a post referendum poll in late July that suggested opinion against the Treaty had hardened. The Yes lead was even stronger at almost 2:1 in a RED C survey in mid January 2009, and the question asked on this occasion contained no qualification.

There was relatively little change after this point. This is consistent with the argument that what had changed was the economic circumstances rather than a change, through guarantees, of the Treaty itself.

Respondents to the two polls analysed here were asked about the benefits that could be expected from the EU in future. In 2008 the question was “what would you expect for the next few years, would you expect Ireland to benefit from being a member of the EU, or not?” The wording in 2009 was somewhat different, but it could be argued, still comparable: “The outcome of the referendum of 2 October was a ‘Yes’ to the Lisbon Treaty. Which of the following statements comes closest to your view? ‘The referendum result will help an economic recovery in Ireland’ OR ‘the referendum result will be harmful to an economic recovery in Ireland’”. The 2008 wording was related to vote choice with those expecting benefits more likely to vote Yes. However, in 2009 the relationship was much, much stronger.

A post-referendum Eurobarometer poll lends additional support to this. The top three reasons given by respondents who voted Yes were: EU has been/is good for Ireland (51%), The treaty is good for Ireland/ it was in the best interest of Ireland (44%) and It will help the economy (33%) (Irish Times ‘Economy played key role in treaty vote, poll finds’, Oct 13, 2009). A similar picture emerged from a post referendum poll carried out for the Irish Times by TNS/MRBI (Voters vacillate between gratitude and fear on EU: Nov 11, 2009).

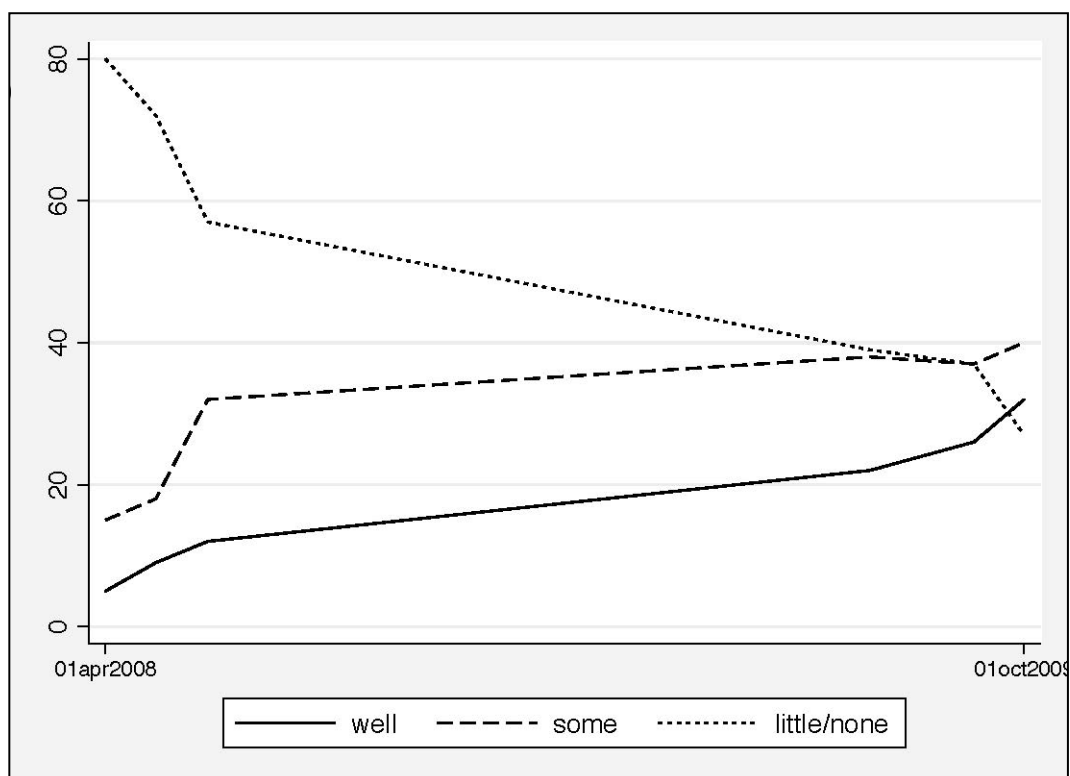
## VIII. Conclusions

The unambiguous finding here is that the two outcomes owe more to the fact of different campaigns in a different context than any underlying change in attitudes or loyalties. It is certainly arguable that greater levels of information in 2009 did help the Yes vote, by weakening perceptions that the Treaty would have adverse consequences for many things that voters might value, and for providing voters with the confidence not to reject anything that an almost unprecedentedly unpopular government might suggest. It is tempting to think that the increase in the numbers of voters who felt they did have a good understanding of the Treaty did make a big difference, but the evidence is hardly clear on this point. Rather, the change in the outcome is more likely due to the very different circumstances in which the second referendum was fought. The significance of these results is most obviously that the results we find in any analysis are contingent, but also that the nature of the campaign is an important aspect of that contingency. However, they also suggest that the view that more intense campaigns serve to promote issue voting should also be qualified, and also raise some questions about the extent to which voters do really make the 'right' choice even when they have little information. In essence the stronger campaign may have removed some of the justifications for voting No, but the most critical fact, and perhaps one stressed implicitly in the Yes campaign, was that this vote was less about the Treaty and more about sending a signal to the EU that we were good Europeans (and could look forward to help in the future.) Curiously perhaps, the No side promoted the first vote as a free vote, arguing that terms could be renegotiated. That the second time around was a real vote all sides agreed, but perhaps it was still a signalling vote. The first time the signal was try again, and anyway we don't need you; next time it was Help!

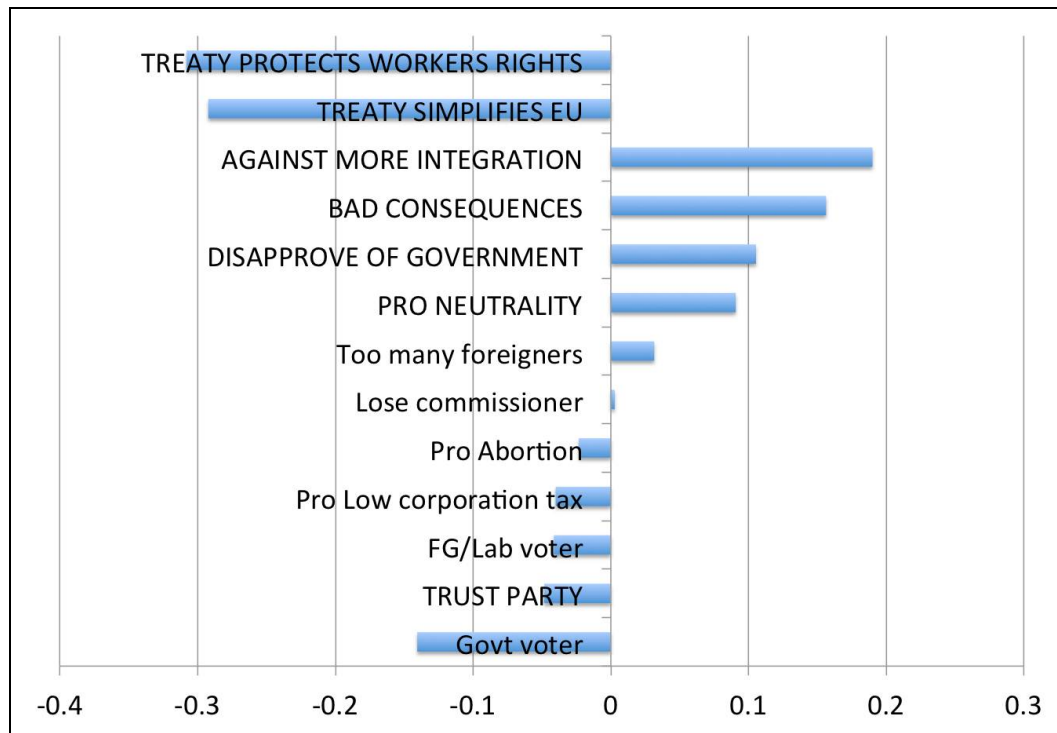


## IX. Appendix

**Figure 1:** Changing levels of understanding



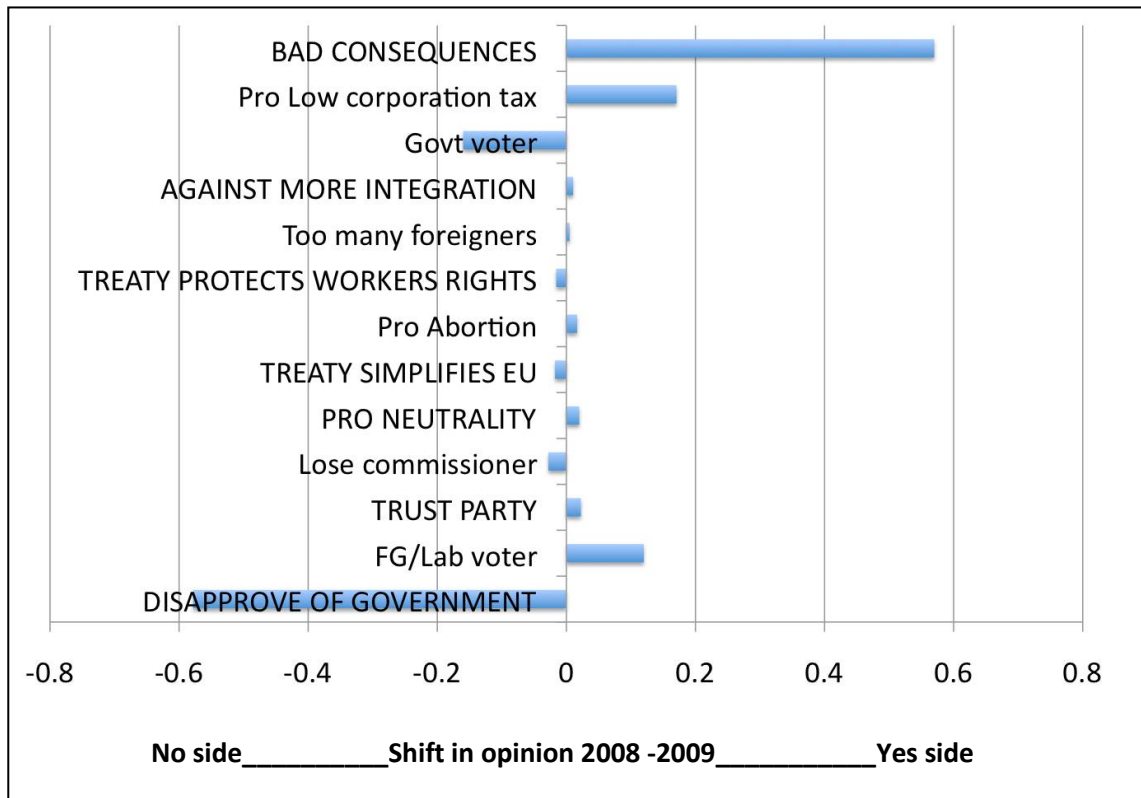
**Figure 2:** Marginal effects on No vote in 2008 (significant effects in capitals)



Logit estimation using multivariate model which also included gender, age and occupation, as well as national/European identity

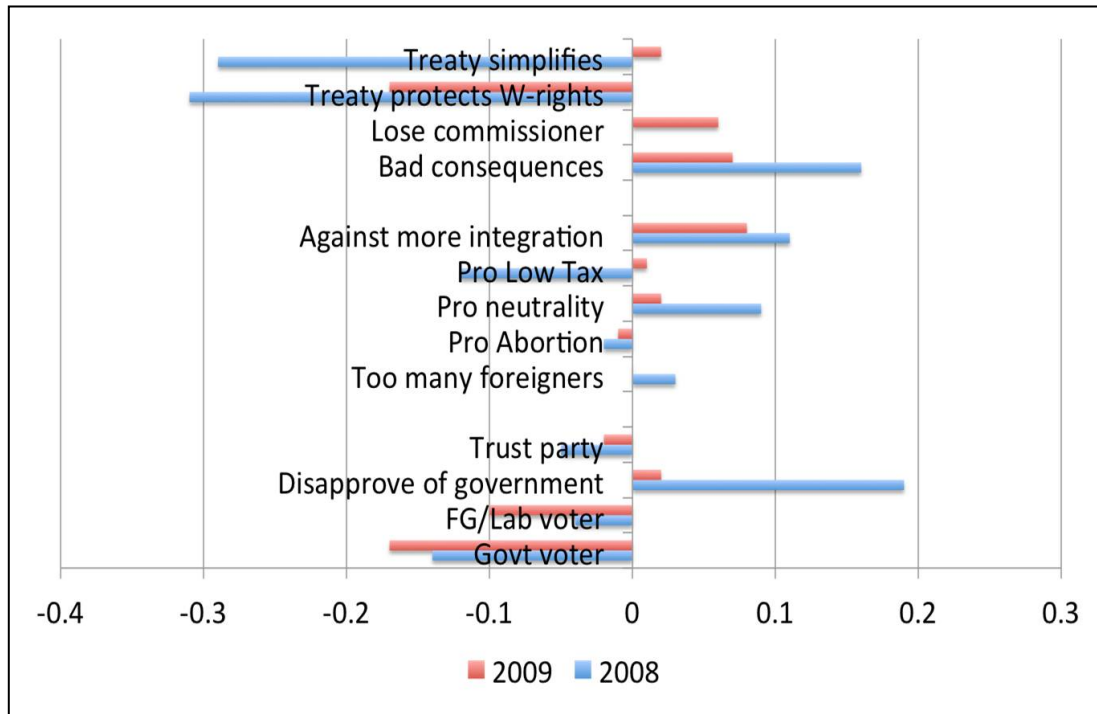
Note: Bad consequences include those on neutrality, employment, abortion, influence in EU and business taxation

**Figure 3:** Shifts in balance of opinion on key factors 2008-2009 (significant effects in capitals)



Note: Bad consequences include those on neutrality, employment, abortion, influence in EU and business taxation

**Figure 4:** Marginal effects on No vote, 2008 and 2009



Note: Bad consequences include those on neutrality, employment, abortion, influence in EU and business taxation

**Table 1:** Marginal effects on No vote in 2008 (significant effects in bold)

	<b>2008</b>
<b>Government voter</b>	<b>-0.14</b>
FG/Lab voter	<b>-0.04</b>
<b>Disapprove of government</b>	<b>0.19</b>
Trust party	<b>-0.05</b>
Too many foreigners	<b>0.03</b>
Pro abortion	<b>-0.02</b>
<b>Pro neutrality</b>	<b>0.09</b>
<b>Bad consequences</b>	<b>0.16</b>
<b>Pro low corporation tax</b>	<b>-0.12</b>
Lose commissioner	<b>0.00</b>
<b>Against more Integration</b>	<b>0.11</b>
<b>Treaty protects W-rights</b>	<b>-0.31</b>
<b>Treaty simplifies</b>	<b>-0.29</b>

**Table 2:** Shifts in balance of opinion on key factors 2008-2009 (positive sign indicates shift favouring Yes side)

	2008	2009	Change
Government voter (1/0)	0.41	0.25	-0.16
FG/Lab voter (1/0)	0.32	0.45	+0.13
Disapprove of government (1/4)	2.80	3.38	-0.58
Trust party (4/0)	2.57	2.66	+0.09
Too many foreigners (3/1)	2.21	2.20	+0.01
Pro abortion (3/1)	2.57	2.62	-0.05
Pro neutrality (3/1)	2.62	2.56	+0.06
Bad consequences (5/0)	2.30	1.73	+0.57
Pro low corporation tax (3/1)	2.56	2.39	0.17
Lose commissioner (1/0)	0.15	0.23	-0.08
Against more Integration (3/1)	1.71	1.66	+0.05
Treaty protects W-rights (1/0)	0.57	0.62	+0.05
Treaty simplifies (1/0)	0.74	0.79	+0.05

**Table 3:** Marginal effects on No vote, 2008 and 2009 (positive sign indicates a shift favouring the Yes side)

	2008	2009	Difference in size
Government voter	-0.14	-0.26	+0.11
FG/Lab voter	-0.04	-0.16	+0.12
Disapprove of government	0.19	0.10	+0.09
Trust party	-0.05	0.02	-0.07
Too many foreigners	0.03	-0.05	-0.08
Pro abortion	-0.02	-0.05	-0.03
Pro neutrality	0.09	0.06	+0.03
Bad consequences	0.16	0.16	0.00
Pro low corporation tax	-0.12	0.00	-0.12
Lose commissioner	0.00	0.03	-0.03
Against more Integration	0.11	0.13	-0.02
Treaty protects W-rights	-0.31	-0.16	-0.15
Treaty simplifies	-0.29	-0.17	-0.12

## X. References

- Beach, D. and R.L. Nielsen (2007) 'Voter choice in EU referendums – a status quo- oriented issue-voting model of voting behavior', Paper presented at the EUSA Tenth Biennial International Conference, Montreal (Canada), 17-19 May, 2007.
- Bowler, S. and Donovan, T. (1998) *Demanding Choices: Opinion, Voting and Direct Democracy*, Ann Arbor: University of Michigan.
- Clarke, H.D., A. Kornberg and M.C. Stewart (2000) 'A note on referendum voting as political choice', Paper presented at the "Rethinking Democracy in the New Millennium" Conference, University of Houston, Florida, February 17-19, 2000.
- Collins, S. and M. Hennessy (2008) Taoiseach intensifies campaign to reverse Lisbon slide. *The Irish Times*, June 6, 2008.
- Eurobarometer 2009. *Eurobarometer 69.2.: Public Opinion in the European Union. Executive Summary: Ireland*. Brussels: European Commission.
- European Commission. 2008. *Flash Eurobarometer 245*, June 2008. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_245\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_245_en.pdf) (accessed 20 March 2011)
- European Commission. 2009. *Flash Eurobarometer 265*, August 2009. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_265\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_265_en.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2010)
- European Commission. 2009. *Flash Eurobarometer 284*, October 2009. [http://ec.europa.eu/public\\_opinion/flash/fl\\_284\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/flash/fl_284_en.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2010)
- Farrell, D.M. and R. Schmitt-Beck (2002) *Do political campaigns matter? Campaign effects in elections and referendums*. London: Routledge
- Franklin, M. (2002) 'Learning from the Danish case: a comment on Palle Svensson's critique of the Franklin thesis', *European Journal of Political Research* 41: 751–7.
- Franklin, M., Marsh, M. and McLaren, L. (1994) 'Uncorking the bottle: popular opposition to European unification in the wake of Maastricht', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 32(4): 455–72.
- Garry, J., M. Marsh and R. Sinnott (2005) "'Second-order" versus "Issue Voting" Effects in EU Referendums: Evidence from the Irish Nice Treaty Referendums', *European Union Politics*, 6(2): 201-21.
- Hobolt, S.B. (2009) *Europe in Question*. Oxford: OUP.
- Hobolt, S.B. (2005a) 'When Europe matters: the impact of political information on voting behaviour in EU referendums', *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 15(1): 85–109.
- Hobolt, S.B. (2005b) 'Taking cues on Europe? Voter competence in EU referendums'. Paper presented at the EUSA Conference 2005, Austin, Texas.
- Hobolt, S.B. (2009) 'Framing effects in referendums on European Integration: Experimental Evidence', Paper presented at the EUSA Eleventh Biennial International Conference, LA (California), April 23-25, 2009.

- Holbrook, T.M. (1996) *Do campaigns matter?* London: Sage.
- Horan, A. 'Taoiseach Criticised for Not Reading Treaty "from Cover to Cover"'. *The Irish Times*, 14 May 2008.
- Hug, S. (2002) *Voices of Europe: Citizens, Referendums and European Integration*, Boulder, CO: Rowman & Littlefield
- Hug, S. and Tsebelis, G. (2002) 'Veto players and referendums around the world', *Journal of Theoretical Politics* 14(4): 465-515.
- Lupia, A. (1992) 'Busy voters, agenda control, and the power of information', *American Political Science Review* 86: 390-403.
- Lupia, A. (1994) 'Shortcuts versus encyclopaedias: information and voting behaviour in California insurance reform elections', *American Political Science Review* 88(1): 63-76.
- Lupia, A. and Johnston, R. (2001) 'Are voters to blame? Voter competence and elite manoeuvres in Referendums', in M. Mendelsohn and A. Parkin (eds), *Referendum Democracy: Citizens, Elites and Deliberation in Referendum Campaigns*, New York: Palgrave.
- Millward Brown IMS. September 2008. *Post Lisbon Treaty Referendum Research Findings*. [http://www.dfa.ie/uploads/documents/Publications/Post%20Lisbon%20Treaty%20Referendum%20Research%20Findings/post%20lisbon%20treaty%20referendum%20research%20findings\\_sept08.pdf](http://www.dfa.ie/uploads/documents/Publications/Post%20Lisbon%20Treaty%20Referendum%20Research%20Findings/post%20lisbon%20treaty%20referendum%20research%20findings_sept08.pdf) (accessed 20 March 2011)
- Qvortrup, M. (2009) 'Rebels without a Cause? The Irish Referendum on the Lisbon Treaty', *The Political Quarterly*, 80(1): 59-66.
- Referendum Commission. 2008. Report of the Referendum Commission on the Referendum on the Twenty-eighth Amendment of the Constitution Bill 2008.
- Referendum Commission. 2009. Lisbon Treaty Report. <http://www.refcom.ie/en/Pastreferendums/LisbonTreaty2009/Reports/ReportonthereferendumontheLisbonTreaty2009/File,11756,en.pdf> (accessed 20 March 2011)
- Reif, K. and H. Schmitt (1980) 'Nine second-order national elections: A conceptual framework for the analysis of European Election Results', *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(1): 3-44.
- Sinnott, R., J.A. Elkind, K. O'Rourke and J. McBride (2009) 'Attitudes and Behaviour in the Referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon: Report prepared for the Department of Foreign Affairs'. UCD Geary Institute.
- Siune, K., P. Svensson and O. Tonsgaard (1994) 'The European Union: The Danes said "No" in 1992 but "Yes" in 1993: How and Why?', *Electoral Studies*, 13(2): 107-116.
- TNS-MRBI/*Irish Times* polls, in: Republic of Ireland, 2008. Data section 2008. *Irish Political Studies* 24(2): 137-187.
- De Vreese, C.H. and H.A. Semetko (2004) *Political Campaigning in Referendums: Framing the Referendum Issue*. Abingdon: Routledge.
- De Vreese, C.H. and H.A. Semetko, H. A. (2004). 'News Matters: Influences on the vote in a referendum campaign'. *European Journal of Political Research*, 43 (5), 699-722.



Zaller, R. (1992) *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.



---

Authors: Michael Marsh and Laura Schwirz

Title: Déjà-vu (again): The Lisbon Treaty Referendum in Ireland

Reihe Politikwissenschaft / Political Science Series 133

Editor: Prof. Johannes Pollak, IHS

Associate Editor: Sarah Christian, IHS

ISSN: 1605-8003

© 2013 by the Department of Political Science, Institute for Advanced Studies (IHS),  
Stumpergasse 56, A-1060 Vienna • ☎ +43 1 59991-0 • Fax +43 1 59991-555 • <http://www.ihs.ac.at>

---

